It was everything he'd wanted. Everything he'd worked for.

THE FINAL FOLLOWER

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Gabriel sat alone in the darkness, a faint glow from his phone the only source of light in the room. The city stretched out beneath him, its lights like tiny, blinking stars on a pitch-black canvas. He leaned back in his chair, tapping his fingers absentmindedly on the glass of his phone. The cold air from the open window cut through his apartment, but it wasn't enough to shake the feeling that something was wrong.

His apartment, sleek, sterile and undeniably modern, was supposed to represent his success. The marble countertops, the black leather couch, the walls adorned with art that screamed sophistication. It was everything he'd wanted. Everything he'd worked for. Yet, when he looked around, he couldn't shake the gnawing emptiness that clung to him like a second skin.

He had hundreds of thousands of followers online. Brands sent him clothes. People complimented him on his looks, his lifestyle, his "aesthetic." They envied him, worshipped him even. But in the quiet moments, when no one was watching, the emptiness inside him seemed to expand, swallowing everything.

Another swipe.

Images flashed on the screen, perfect bodies, filtered faces, lives that were so polished they seemed unreal. It was all so fake. So hollow. But there was nothing else to fill the void, so he kept scrolling. Like a starving man at a feast, never truly satisfied.

And then, amidst the endless parade of flawless images, one caught his attention.

It wasn't the typical influencer post. No bikini shots or expensive sunglasses. No curated shots of fancy coffees and smiling friends. This one… this one was different.

The woman in the picture wasn't like the others. Her features were sharp, unnatural even. She had high cheekbones, a narrow jawline, and skin so pale it almost glowed. But it was her eyes that stopped Gabriel cold. They were dark, black, really pupil-

less voids, and they stared straight through him, as though she were looking right into his soul. A chill ran down his spine.

She was smiling, but it wasn't a smile of joy. It was something far darker. A grin that seemed to stretch too wide for her face, showing too many teeth. Gabriel couldn't look away. He felt it, an undeniable pull toward her.

Her name was Selene.

A shiver ran through him, and he tried to shake it off. But he couldn't.

He tapped on her profile. The screen loaded quickly, but it wasn't like other influencer accounts. There were no captions, no hashtags about life hacks or fashion trends. Just a single line in her bio: *#NightIsYours*.

A subtle, but unmistakable pull in his chest tugged at him. *Follow her,* it whispered. *You have to follow her.*

Gabriel's fingers hovered over the "Follow" button. But there was something else that caught his eye. A notification popped up... *Message from Unknown User*.

He hesitated. The anonymity of it, the mystery, sent a wave of discomfort over him. He opened the message.

Follow her. Or you will regret it.

Gabriel laughed nervously, dismissing it with a flick of his thumb. He shook his head, but the unease lingered, settling deeper in his gut. A chill ran through him, more pronounced than before, and he rubbed his arms as though the cold was coming from inside him.

The lights in his apartment flickered. Once. Twice. Gabriel froze. That was odd. The power had never gone out before. He checked his phone's battery, 100%. His air conditioning was on, humming low, the only other sound in the room.

His eyes scanned the dark corners of the apartment. Nothing. Just the shadows, stretched by the city lights filtering through the window. He was alone. It was nothing. Just a flicker. Probably just some faulty wiring.

But then, there was a sound.

A soft scuffing noise. A tap, followed by another, more deliberate.

Footsteps.

His head snapped to the hallway, toward the door. It was faint, almost imperceptible, but it was there. Someone was moving outside his apartment.

His heartbeat quickened.

You're being ridiculous, he thought. *Just go check. It's probably nothing.*

But his feet stayed rooted to the floor. He had lived here for years, in this high-rise tower above the city, surrounded by glass and steel. No one came to visit unless they were invited, and no one would have any reason to be out there at this hour.

The footsteps grew louder.

Slow, measured, deliberate.

He felt his throat tighten, the air around him suddenly thick with dread. The flickering lights now seemed like a warning. A sign. His skin prickled as the footsteps neared the door, too close for comfort.

Suddenly, they stopped.

Complete silence.

Gabriel's breath caught in his throat. His mind screamed at him to move, to do something ...anything. But his body refused to respond.

The doorbell rang.

It was a single, sharp chime. So sudden, so jarring, that it nearly sent Gabriel's heart into his throat.

He swallowed hard, standing frozen in place.

His phone buzzed again, a new message lighting up the screen.

Don't open the door, Gabriel. You've already made the wrong choice.

He opened his mouth to speak, to call out, but no words came. His fingers fumbled for the phone, but when he tried to respond, his screen went black.

The doorbell rang again, louder this time.

Gabriel slowly turned toward the door. His legs felt like lead, but somehow, his feet carried him forward. He reached for the doorknob, his hand trembling.

And then he heard it, soft laughter, dripping with malice. A laugh that wasn't human.

A laugh that came from the other side of the door.

Gabriel's fingers brushed the cool metal of the knob, and the lights flickered again, this time plunging the apartment into total darkness.

And in that moment, Gabriel realized that whatever was out there, waiting for him, wasn't from this world.

It was from the other side of the screen.

The Virtual Hunger

Gabriel couldn't remember the last time he'd been this absorbed in his phone. He sat on the edge of his bed, the dim light from his screen casting pale reflections on his face as he scrolled through endless streams of posts. The digital glow illuminated his chiselled features, accentuating the artificial perfection of the world he inhabited. Brands, influencers, likes, comments, the carefully curated fragments of his life danced in front of him like a glittering parade of emptiness. He was an influencer. He was someone. Or so he told himself.

But lately, something had changed. The endless scroll felt less like a hobby and more like a trap. And it was all because of her.

Selene.

Her name had appeared in his feed about a month ago, a profile with just a handful of posts and a growing list of followers. At first, Gabriel hadn't thought much of it. Another influencer in a sea of thousands, posting cryptic selfies and posing in her high-end clothes. But then it happened, her following exploded, seemingly overnight, like some sort of viral wildfire. Celebrities began to mention her in passing, brands started offering her sponsorship deals, and before long, even the tech giants were scrambling to get her endorsement.

Gabriel was used to this kind of thing. He'd seen it all before. The rise and fall of influencers was nothing new, but this, this was different. There was something strange about her.

Selene's feed wasn't filled with the usual posts. No sponsored coffee cups, no posed vacation shots, no lifestyle tips. Instead, her captions were darker, more obscure. Each post had a haunting, cryptic phrase:

"The night is always watching."

"I feed off what you give."

The first time Gabriel saw one of her posts, he felt a strange unease, like he'd walked into a room filled

with shadows and couldn't find the light. Her pictures weren't like the others. Her skin was unnaturally pale, almost translucent, as though sunlight could never touch her. Her smile was wide, but there was something sinister about it, something that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

But it was the eyes. God, the eyes. Those black, empty voids staring back at him from the screen. They were deep, consuming, like they could pull you in and never let go.

Gabriel tapped the follow button on a whim. Maybe it was curiosity. Maybe it was because he knew there was something more to this than just a new social media sensation. His fingers hovered over the screen, and a strange thought crossed his mind: *What if I could be a part of something bigger?*

He wasn't proud of the thought. He didn't even fully understand it. But it was there.

Days passed, and Selene's posts continued. Each one grew darker, more disturbing. Her smile twisted, her eyes hollowed out further, and her skin seemed to lose colour with every update. But despite his growing discomfort, Gabriel couldn't unfollow her. The more he saw, the more he needed to see. Her feed

was addictive, like a slow-moving train wreck that he couldn't look away from.

It wasn't just her presence that kept him hooked, though. There was something about the messages that came with her posts. Her words were always brief, but each one felt like a command. A summons.

"The night is always watching."
"I feed off what you give."
"Do you feel it? The hunger."

And then, there was the feeling, the subtle shift in the air, like the temperature dropping just below comfortable. It started to seep into his own life. The darkness in her posts began to creep into his thoughts, infecting his dreams. Sometimes, he'd wake up with the sensation that something was standing at the foot of his bed, watching him. He'd lie still; too afraid to move, afraid that if he made a sound, whatever was there would get closer.

One evening, after another round of scrolling through her increasingly disturbing feed, Gabriel snapped. He couldn't take it anymore. He had to know what she was. He had to know what this was. He opened the messaging app and typed:

What are you?

He hit send and stared at the blinking cursor. The seconds stretched into eternity.

Then, almost instantly, a reply appeared:

I'm a reflection of you. A reflection of everything you desire... but cannot have.

Gabriel's pulse quickened. He stared at the message, not entirely sure how to process it. He ran a hand through his hair, trying to laugh it off. *This is just some weird marketing tactic*, he told himself. *It's all a gimmick.*

But deep down, a small, cold part of him knew something wasn't right. That sense of unease he'd felt when he first saw her posts was growing now, pooling in his stomach like an unspoken warning.

He quickly typed back, trying to regain some control:

You're just another influencer, right? This is all just for attention, isn't it?

The reply came quickly, like she was waiting for him.

You are already giving me what I want. But you won't remember, Gabriel. You'll only want more.

His fingers froze. He wasn't sure why, but those words hit him harder than anything had in a long time. The cryptic nature of it unsettled him, but it was more than just that. It was the feeling that her words, *she* was watching him. She knew his name. She knew him.

His phone buzzed again. Another message.

"Look at me. Look deeper."

Gabriel's hands shook as he opened her latest post. It was another picture of Selene, but this time, it was different. The usual pale, flawless skin was now smeared with something dark, like ink bleeding into the picture. Her smile had stretched impossibly wide, the corners of her mouth pulling back to reveal teeth too sharp, too many. Her eyes were fully black now, empty, hungry voids. In the reflection of her pupils, he thought he could see something moving… something shifting, like shadows with minds of their own.

A cold sweat broke out across his back.

He tapped the screen, desperate to turn it off, but the image wouldn't go away. It lingered, flickering like

a broken television screen. The air in his apartment grew heavy, as if the walls themselves were closing in. He could feel the weight of something pressing down on him. Something was coming for him, just beyond the screen.

Suddenly, his phone buzzed again.

"I'm coming for you, Gabriel. You've given me enough now."

Gabriel's breath caught in his throat. His heart pounded against his ribcage as a cold shiver ran through him. It felt like something had shifted in the air, like a storm was about to break.

A knock echoed from the door.

The sound was slow at first, methodical. One, two, three knocks. Each one louder than the last.

Gabriel stood frozen, unable to move. He glanced at the door and back at his phone. It couldn't be her. It couldn't.

But the message on his screen remained: *I'm coming for you, Gabriel.*

The knocking continued.

Gabriel's breath hitched. He didn't know what was happening, but he couldn't stay here. He had to get out. He had to escape.

And then, before he could move, the door handle turned.

The darkness outside crept in, inching toward him, the faint smell of something like burnt metal filling his nostrils.

It was too late to run now.

The Follow

Gabriel couldn't help it. His fingers itched every time his phone was within reach, like a smoker reaching for a cigarette, except this craving wasn't for nicotine, it was for her. Selene. Her every post, every cryptic word, every shadow that flickered behind her on camera was a magnet pulling him closer, deeper into the web of her influence. He couldn't look away.

The obsession had grown, slowly at first, like the tide creeping higher, but now it consumed him completely. Every moment not spent immersed in her feed felt like a waste. He had checked his Instagram, her Twitter, and even her Facebook (though the latter was only accessible if you knew where to look) a thousand times, always searching for something new, something darker, something that would confirm the twisted sensation creeping up his spine.

Selene's rise had been rapid, her followers growing exponentially with each passing day. Gabriel wasn't alone in his fascination ...no, her presence was intoxicating, and people were hooked. Fans whispered about her, half-joking but half-afraid, sharing rumours that no one could quite confirm, about people who had come too close to her, who had been lured into her world only to vanish.

It started small, an occasional post that made his skin crawl. A selfie here, a tweet there, something in the shadows that made him wonder. But it escalated quickly.

Then came the Twitch streams.

Gabriel had tuned in, half-certain that the unsettling energy around her would only increase with the live interaction. But when he saw her in real-time, the impact was far greater than he could have imagined. Her image flickered on the screen, cold and distant, yet there was something about her presence that made the room feel smaller, the air thicker. Her face was framed in pale light, her skin still ghostly, her eyes shadowed in a way that was almost hypnotic. But it wasn't just the way she looked; it was the way she held the camera, like she was looking at *him*. Looking through him.

Gabriel could feel the pressure building in his chest as he watched. She wasn't speaking much, just staring directly into the camera, her mouth twitching into that strange, knowing smile, like she was holding something back, something much darker than a simple online persona. The tension grew, a subtle, quiet horror that clawed at the edges of his consciousness, threatening to break through at any moment.

Her gaze flickered slightly as though she had just seen him. No, *felt* him.

And then, she said something that chilled Gabriel to his core.

"I want to show you something," Selene's voice poured out from the speakers, slow, honeyed, but with an undercurrent of something… *dangerous*. "Come closer…"

Gabriel's breath caught in his throat. The words were hypnotic, like a siren's call—he *had* to respond. His fingers twitched over the keyboard as if they weren't his own. Before he could even think, he typed the words: *Show me.*

For a moment, there was silence. Gabriel's heart pounded in his chest, and he waited, the ticking of

the clock on the wall the only sound filling the void.

And then, her smile deepened—stretching unnaturally wide, like it shouldn't have been able to. Her teeth, sharp and too many, gleamed in the dim lighting. Her eyes, blacker than before, shimmered, glowing faintly with something unholy. She leaned forward, her lips moving in a slow, deliberate manner.

Come closer. In more ways than one.

Gabriel shuddered, an involuntary gasp escaping his lips. His skin prickled with a sense of cold dread, but his eyes remained fixed on the screen, drawn to her, like a moth to a flame.

That was when the crash came.

The sound of glass shattering ripped through the air like a gunshot, and Gabriel's heart lurched in his chest. His hands flew to his head, fingers gripping his hair, trying to make sense of the sudden noise. He whipped around, searching for the source, panic surging through him like a surge of ice-cold water.

Through the haze of confusion, Gabriel saw the shards of his window, glittering in the dim light of his room, the jagged pieces catching the faint glow of

his phone screen. The wind howled in from outside, stirring the remnants of glass across the floor.

And then, standing there in the broken frame of his window, was a figure. Dressed in black, their face hidden in shadow, they were barely visible except for the faint outline of a silhouette. Gabriel's breath caught in his throat. He froze. He couldn't move.

The figure didn't speak immediately. It stood motionless, its head tilted slightly as though assessing him. Gabriel's mind raced, scrambling for a way to explain this—was it some kind of prank? Some horrible coincidence? But then the figure stepped forward, and Gabriel saw the gleam of something sharp, something metallic, in the stranger's hand.

For a brief moment, there was no sound but the soft crackling of broken glass beneath their boots.

"You shouldn't have followed her," the figure's voice was low, rough, like sandpaper scraping against stone.

Gabriel's pulse raced. "Who... who are you?" he demanded, forcing the words out, his voice shaking despite himself.

The figure didn't answer, instead stepping further into the room, its black clothes swallowing up the

light. Gabriel's phone, still in his hand, buzzed. He glanced down at the screen, his heart nearly stopping when he saw her name, Selene, flashing across it.

Her words blinked into existence like a poison:

You followed, Gabriel. Now you must pay the price.

The figure moved faster than Gabriel could react. One second, it was standing there, and the next, it was beside him, its cold hand on his wrist, pulling the phone from his fingers. Gabriel tried to scream, to break free, but his voice caught in his throat. The stranger's grip was unyielding, like iron, like death itself.

"You shouldn't have followed her, Gabriel," the figure repeated, and its voice was now thick with something darker, something predatory.

Suddenly, the lights flickered. The world around him felt unreal, like he was trapped in a nightmare where time moved at the whim of whoever controlled it.

Gabriel's eyes flicked back to the screen, where Selene's face now filled the frame, her smile wide and cruel, her eyes glowing with the same eerie blackness that had haunted him from the beginning. Her

laughter, soft, distant, whispered through the speakers of his phone.

"You're mine now, Gabriel," she whispered. "You wanted to see me. Now… you will."

The figure's hand tightened on Gabriel's wrist, and the air seemed to crackle, thick with an unnatural energy, as though the room itself were closing in around him.

And then, with a sudden, terrifying clarity, Gabriel realized that *Selene* was not just a person. She was a force. A hunger. Something that had always been there, lurking beneath the veil of this digital world, waiting for someone foolish enough to *follow*.

And now, there was no way out.

The figure leaned in, its breath cold against Gabriel's skin. The last thing he saw before everything went dark was Selene's face, her eyes gleaming with a twisted promise.

He was hers now.

The Transformation

Gabriel's body trembled as he backed away, the cold air settling in around him like a tangible thing. He had tried to dismiss it at first, this growing feeling of dread, this uncanny sensation that had settled in his chest like a stone. But now, standing face to face with the figure in his broken window, he could no longer deny it. His breath came in shallow bursts, and his skin felt clammy, cold against the growing heat of his panic.

The figure stepped further into the room, her boots clicking softly on the wooden floor, and as the door creaked shut behind her, it was as if the room had plunged ten degrees colder. Gabriel's breath turned to mist in the suddenly frigid air. He could feel his teeth starting to chatter, but he couldn't move, couldn't pull away.

"Selene..." Gabriel whispered, his voice shaking, throat tight. His heart hammered in his chest, racing with fear and an unexpected curiosity.

"Yes, Gabriel," she answered, her voice lilting and low, almost melodic. Her eyes locked on his black as voids, bottomless, devouring. "I'm here."

A soft rustle followed as she slowly, deliberately, removed the hood of her cloak. Gabriel's heart skipped a beat, his pulse hammering faster, louder, as her face was revealed to him. She was beautiful, undeniably, heartbreakingly so, but there was something wrong about her, something off. Her skin was ashen, pale, almost gray in the flickering light. Her lips were dark, as though stained with some sickeningly rich hue of red, and her teeth… Gabriel's breath caught in his throat as the tips of her fangs gleamed, sharp, white and predatory.

Her hair fell around her face in long, inky waves, but her eyes, those eyes, were the most haunting part. They were empty, black pools, reflecting no light, no humanity, nothing but an abyss. As she moved, her gaze followed him, unblinking. There was nothing warm about her. Nothing human. And yet, there was an overwhelming pull, a magnetic force that Gabriel could feel all the way down to his bones.

"Don't fight it," she whispered, her voice smooth, hypnotic. The sound of her words wrapped around him like a blanket, heavy and suffocating. "You're already a part of this."

Gabriel wanted to scream, wanted to bolt for the door, but his legs felt like they were made of lead. The room was spinning. His chest felt tight, his breaths shallow and uneven. His fingers twitched, reaching for his phone on the nearby table, his mind screaming at him to call for help, to do anything but stand here in the presence of something... unnatural.

"What... what do you want from me?" Gabriel croaked, his voice barely a whisper. He tried to back away, but he couldn't tear his eyes from hers. She moved with a fluid grace that seemed to make the air around her hum.

"I want everything you've ever wanted, Gabriel," she said, her voice dropping lower, rich and dark like a velvet night. "I want to show you what true power feels like. I want you to see the world as it really is."

The room seemed to close in on him. Gabriel swallowed hard, the words she spoke were like a siren's call, drawing him closer to the edge of something he couldn't comprehend. Something... ancient. The

hunger inside him, the gnawing emptiness that had driven him to chase fame, to carve his name into the world in some desperate attempt to make it mean something, suddenly felt so small. So insignificant.

"Power," Gabriel repeated, his voice hollow, as though the word had lost its meaning entirely. He felt something stir inside him, something deep and primal. His hand, without his consent, reached out toward her.

"Immortality," Selene continued, her voice soft but edged with something dangerous. "I give you everything you desire. Power. Influence. Immortality."

Gabriel's pulse raced. Every bone in his body screamed to refuse her. To shut this down, to push her away, to run. But in the back of his mind, the thought persisted. The thought that had always been there. He'd wanted to be someone. He'd wanted to matter. To stand above others.

To never be forgotten. To live forever.

She smiled, a slow, knowing curl of her lips. It wasn't a smile of kindness, it was a smile of triumph, of *victory*. She knew he was already lost.

"Just take my hand," she whispered, reaching out with slender, pale fingers. "Come with me, Gabriel. You'll never regret it. You'll never grow old, never feel the passage of time again. You will be part of something greater. I can show you the world, Gabriel. The real world. The one beyond the veil of illusions."

Her hand hovered inches from his, a mere breath away, and Gabriel felt his heart pound in his chest. He could feel the warmth radiating from her, but it wasn't the kind of warmth that made him feel safe. No, this was a heat that burned, that scorched. A heat that promised destruction.

He opened his mouth to speak, to refuse, but his voice died in his throat. The pull was too strong. The hunger inside him screamed to be fed. His breath quickened, and before he even realized what he was doing, he stepped forward, his hand meeting hers.

The moment their skin touched, Gabriel's entire body froze. His heart skipped a beat, and then another, and another. He could feel something inside of him... twisting, changing. His skin burned, like fire coursing through his veins, and then a sharp, biting cold that felt like ice punctured the surface of his skin.

Her touch was so much colder than he could have

imagined, like death itself. His vision blurred, and the world around him seemed to distort, bending in on itself. Time slowed. The edges of reality felt sharp, frayed, like the seams of an old garment ready to tear apart.

Gabriel gasped, pulling away, but it was too late. The transformation had begun.

Her eyes widened, filled with something that looked almost like... pride. "That's it, Gabriel," she breathed, her voice smooth as silk, as though she was savouring each moment. "You wanted power. You wanted to be more than just a man. And now, you will be. You will be *mine*."

A strange, horrifying pain surged through him, starting deep in his chest and radiating outward. It was like his blood had turned to fire, his muscles pulling and contracting in ways they shouldn't. He could feel his senses heightening, the world around him growing sharper, clearer—yet somehow more distant. He could hear the faintest whisper of her voice, and it felt like it was inside his head, inside his bones, inside his *soul*.

Gabriel's vision swam with blackness, his body convulsing with the changes. His teeth, his finger-

nails, his skin, all felt like they were splitting open, transforming into something new. Something... monstrous.

"No," he gasped, but the words were nothing more than a distant echo. His voice was already changing, deepening, his tongue tasting something coppery in the back of his throat.

"You are one of us now," Selene said, her voice lilting with satisfaction. "And you will never be alone again. Together, we will reshape the world."

Gabriel felt the last remnants of his humanity slipping away, like sand through his fingers. His heartbeat, once frantic and panicked, slowed. The hunger... it roared inside of him now, insatiable and overwhelming.

And then, for the first time since he had laid eyes on her, Selene's face softened.

"Welcome to eternity, Gabriel."

The Feast

The days stretched on, oppressive and strange, each one heavier than the last. Gabriel had lost track of the weeks, his sense of time distorted by the growing darkness around him. What started as an eerie fascination with Selene's power had blossomed into something more—a hunger that gnawed at the back of his mind, persistent and insatiable. The lines between the world he knew and the world she promised were blurring, and he no longer knew if he was simply a participant or a prisoner.

Selene had become more than just a figure. She was a leader, a queen, a cult-like force that swept through the world with a fury he had never seen before. Her influence, uncontainable and intoxicating, spread like wildfire. She built an empire, a web of follow-

ers who revered her as a goddess. It began online, as most things did. A movement was born, #EmbraceTheDarkness, her mantra that echoed through the channels of every social media platform, every hidden corner of the dark web.

Gabriel watched in a mix of awe and dread as the numbers swelled. Followers from every corner of the globe pledged themselves to her. They didn't just idolize her, they worshiped her. In pictures, they tried to emulate her gaunt look, her almost skeletal beauty, pale skin, sharp features, the hollow eyes that once only belonged to her. Their faces mirrored hers, devoid of warmth, devoid of humanity. They became pale specters, a reflection of Selene's growing influence. The deeper they went into her world, the further they drifted from their humanity.

Gabriel's phone buzzed late one night, snapping him from his uneasy half-sleep. He sat up quickly, the sound too sudden in the quiet of the room. It was an encrypted message from her.

You're ready, Gabriel. Join me. Drink from me, and never be the same.

The words hung in the air, wrapping themselves around him like a cold shroud. The message was clear.

He no longer needed to hide. He was no longer just a spectator. He had become part of the movement. Part of her. He hadn't even realized it until now, but he had been waiting for this moment, the moment when everything would change. The moment when he would give in.

He dropped the phone in his lap, his fingers shaking. It was so much more than an invitation. It was a command. His pulse quickened, his blood racing in his veins as his eyes flickered over the words again. *Drink from me, and never be the same.*

And the terrifying thing was, he wanted to. He needed to. His eyes fluttered closed as he pictured Selene, her dark eyes, her sharp teeth, the power that radiated off her in waves. He could feel the pull of it, deep inside of him, gnawing at his every thought. He had seen the transformation in others, their gaunt faces, the dark hunger in their eyes. He had seen them all grow more like her.

The message flashed again on his screen, more insistent this time. *Come to me. Don't resist. The feast awaits.*

Gabriel felt his chest tighten. He could hear her voice in his head now, soft and lilting. It wasn't a

voice he had ever imagined. It wasn't just a physical sound. It was inside his mind, curling and coiling like smoke, intoxicating and insidious. It was as if she had always been there, waiting. He hadn't been able to escape her influence. No matter how hard he tried.

His fingers hovered over the phone, trembling, before he finally made the decision.

The city was alive with the hum of nightlife as Gabriel walked the empty streets, his mind a whirlpool of thoughts. He had left his apartment an hour ago, without a plan, without a real sense of where he was going. He just knew he had to see her. The call was too strong, too desperate to ignore.

He passed the neon-lit streets, where shadows twisted unnaturally in the flickering light, and the sound of distant music echoed like a heartbeat. It was almost as though the world itself was moving to a rhythm he couldn't hear, but could feel deep within his bones. He could smell something in the air, something strange, a coppery scent, heavy and almost suffocating.

Gabriel's footsteps quickened, the hairs on the back of his neck rising. Something was wrong. The city was

too quiet now, too still. It was like walking through a dream, where everything felt distant, unreal.

He rounded a corner and stopped dead in his tracks.

There, at the end of the street, stood a group of people. Gabriel's breath hitched in his throat as he looked at them. They were standing motionless, their faces hidden in shadows. There was something wrong with them. They were too still, too silent, like mannequins left too long in the cold. Their eyes, hollow and vacant, reflected the streetlights in an eerie, unnatural way.

They didn't move as he approached. They just stood there, staring, waiting.

Gabriel took a tentative step forward, and suddenly, the silence was shattered by a low, guttural growl. It came from the darkness between the figures, a deep, unsettling sound that scraped at the edges of his sanity.

Then, one of them, someone wearing a tattered black hoodie, stepped forward, his movements jerky, unnatural. His face was so pale it almost glowed, the

skin stretched too tightly over the bones. His eyes gleamed black, pupils pinpricks in the night.

"You've come," the figure rasped, his voice broken, as if it hadn't been used in ages. "You're ready."

Gabriel's heart skipped. The coldness in the air thickened, settling into his skin like ice. This wasn't what he expected. This wasn't just a group of followers. These were... things. They were no longer human, no longer real. They had become creatures of the dark, consumed by something far worse than they realized.

He could feel it now, the hunger. It pulsed through the air around him, thick and suffocating. He could taste it, sharp and metallic on the back of his tongue.

Another figure stepped forward, this one taller, with skin so pale it was almost translucent. Its mouth opened, revealing teeth so sharp, so elongated, that they could have been forged from some unholy steel. "You came for her," it said. "For *Selene*. She has chosen you. Come, Gabriel. The feast is waiting."

And that was it. The decision had been made. There was no turning back. No resistance left in him.

Gabriel moved forward, his limbs heavy, his mind clouded by the lure of what lay beyond. The feast, the power, the promise of *never being the same*.

The figures parted, and there, in the center of the street, stood Selene.

Her pale face was bathed in the dim light, her black eyes glistening with an ancient hunger. She stepped forward, closer, until she was inches from him. Her breath brushed his skin, cool, sweet like the night air and her lips parted, revealing her fangs.

"Welcome, Gabriel," she whispered, her voice a velvet caress that sent shivers down his spine. "Join us."

The moment she touched him, Gabriel felt it all, the fire, the freezing cold, the hunger, the power. He felt it sinking into his very marrow, reshaping him, remaking him into something else. Something new. Something *unholy*.

As he drank from her, the world slipped away. His humanity, his past life, his memories, all of it faded into the darkness, replaced by the unrelenting pull of desire, of hunger, of eternity.

Gabriel was no longer just a man.

He was hers. Forever.

And so, the feast began.

The Final Follow

Gabriel's heart thudded in his chest like a slow drumbeat, its rhythm unsettling and hollow. The dark web was no longer just a collection of networks, it had become something darker, something more insidious. What was once a digital playground had transformed into a grotesque labyrinth, teeming with souls that had been lost to its depths. And Selene was its queen.

He followed her deeper, past the flickering lights of computer screens that danced like ghostly flames, past endless lines of code that crawled like worms beneath the surface of the earth. The air felt thick with static, as though the very atmosphere had been infected by the darkness they had summoned into

the world. Gabriel had been here before, but never this far. This was where the real power lay. Not in the shiny images, the perfect faces, or the fabricated lives of influencers. No, this was deeper. This was a place where souls were harvested, where existence was a currency.

Selene walked ahead of him, her pale face illuminated by the blue glow of a screen. She was a phantom, her movements fluid, unnatural. As she glanced back at him, her lips curled into a smile that held no warmth. Her eyes were black pits, absorbing everything in their gaze, including Gabriel's soul.

"You were always meant to be mine," she whispered, her voice a silky thread that wrapped around his insides. "You were never meant to be anything else."

Gabriel's breath caught in his throat. The words echoed in his mind, reverberating like a haunting melody. He could feel the truth of them in every fibber of his being. She had been the shadow over his life, always watching, always pulling him toward this moment. She was no longer just an influencer, she was a force, an entity that controlled more than just followers. She controlled life itself.

Gabriel looked at his reflection in the dark glass before him. His once vibrant skin had turned ashen, his eyes hollow, sunken into his skull like two empty sockets. The man who had walked into her world was no longer there. That man was gone, replaced by something cold, something ancient. He felt the coldness inside him, creeping and spreading like a cancer. It was no longer a subtle hunger, it was an insatiable thirst. A need that could never be satisfied.

"Is this who I am now?" he whispered, his voice trembling. "Is this... what you've made me?"

Selene's smile deepened, the glint of her fangs visible in the darkness. "It's not just who you are, Gabriel. It's who you were always meant to become. You were never alive until you met me. And now... now you will never die."

A chill swept through him, and he felt the weight of her words settle over him like a shroud. He had willingly embraced the darkness, had plunged himself into the abyss alongside her. But now, standing here, staring into the abyss of his own reflection, he realized the true cost. There was no return. No redemption. Only the endless pull of the void.

"Look at them," Selene said, her voice distant, yet intimate, as though she was speaking directly into his soul. "All of them, just waiting to be taken. To be *embraced*."

Gabriel turned, and for the first time, he saw them, others like him, followers of Selene, standing in the shadows of this digital realm. Their faces were pale, hollow, eyes wide and empty, like mannequins abandoned in the dark. Some of them held their phones, broadcasting their empty lives to the world, trying to capture something they could never understand.

"Do you think they know what they've become?" Gabriel asked, his voice breaking.

Selene's laugh was soft, almost musical. "They never will, Gabriel. It's part of the allure. The promise. They give up everything, but they think they're gaining something. A taste of eternity. A piece of the power they see in me. But they're just... puppets. And you, my dear Gabriel, are my finest creation."

He recoiled, a sudden wave of nausea crashing over him. The anger bubbled up, hot and sharp. How had he let himself fall so far? How had he been so blind to the horror that was unfolding around him?

His mind swirled with confusion, with doubts, with a growing fear that gnawed at his insides. The people, his followers, the ones who had once been like him, were being consumed. They weren't just under her influence. They were being *transformed*, turned into something unrecognizable. Was that his fate, too? To become one of them?

"I never asked for this, Selene," Gabriel whispered, his voice raw, breaking at the edges. "I didn't know... I didn't understand."

She turned to him, her face darkened with something colder than contempt. "You didn't need to understand. You just needed to *follow*."

Before he could say another word, the screens around them flickered, and a new face appeared, one Gabriel hadn't seen before. It was an image, a blurry, grainy shot of a woman standing in a darkened alley, her eyes glowing with the same cold hunger that had first drawn him to Selene. Her face was distorted, unrecognizable, but something about her felt wrong. It wasn't just the predatory gleam in her eyes, it was something deeper. She had come from somewhere else. From beyond the reach of Selene's web.

Gabriel felt a shiver crawl up his spine. There was a new predator on the horizon.

"Who is that?" Gabriel asked, his voice barely a whisper.

Selene's expression darkened, her lips curling into a snarl. "That... is a rival. Someone who's been siphoning the energy I've worked so hard to gather. Someone who believes they can dethrone me."

Gabriel's stomach churned. He didn't know whether he should feel fear or fascination. The woman's eyes locked with his through the screen, and for a brief moment, he swore she knew him. She *saw* him.

And then, in the blink of an eye, the screen went dark.

Gabriel's breath hitched. "What the hell happened?"

Selene's face was now twisted, her features sharp with fury. "She's too powerful," she said, her voice low and strained. "She's coming for all of us."

Gabriel could feel it then, the growing presence of something darker, something far more dangerous than he could have ever imagined. The digital web

he had once thought of as a fortress was now a trap, a place where shadows could strike from anywhere. There was nowhere left to hide.

Selene stepped closer to him, her fingers brushing his cold cheek. “This is the end, Gabriel. For us. For them. For all of us.”

Gabriel turned to her, his mind a battlefield of horror and regret. “No... this can’t be how it ends. Not like this.”

But Selene only smiled, her eyes gleaming with something far more terrifying than Gabriel had ever known. It wasn’t just the darkness. It was the *truth*.

“We were always meant to die in the shadows, Gabriel,” she whispered. “But in the end... we are still only shadows.”

And as the final, crushing realization settled over him, the world around them began to unravel. The screens blinked out one by one, the silence in the digital void growing deeper and colder. Gabriel opened his mouth to scream, to shout, to beg for something, anything to stop it.

But it was too late.

Selene's smile remained, cold and unyielding, as the darkness swallowed him whole.

And the last thing Gabriel felt before everything went black was the weight of the very thing he had always feared: the endless, all-consuming hunger.

The End

The final follower
Julia A. Girard

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It was everything he'd wanted. Everything he'd worked for.

THE FINAL FOLLOWER

Julia A. Girard is a writer who'd rather be caught dead than serious. Her stories and books are a delightful blend of witty observations, quirky characters, and laugh-out-scary moments that will have you hooked from the first page.

JULIA A. GIRARD